



Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead



Richard J. Bruckner
Director

April 28, 2011

TO: Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, Mayor
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe

FROM: Richard J. Bruckner
Director

SUBJECT: LAND ENTITLEMENT PROCESS REVIEW – STATUS UPDATE

This is a status update in response to the Board of Supervisors' (Board) motion directing the Department of Regional Planning (DRP) to conduct a comprehensive review of its existing Land Entitlement Process. DRP completed its review of the process over a seven-month period last year and sent a Final Report to your Board on December 8, 2010. DRP will be providing the Board with quarterly updates regarding implementation of the Final Report recommendations.

Background

On May 25, 2010, your Board directed the DRP to prepare a comprehensive review of case processing, including:

- Identifying specific timeframes for case processing, with performance metrics for processing land use approvals
- Determining measures to streamline the process for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), particularly measures that will expedite Environmental Impact Reports
- Documenting how DRP complies with the Permit Streamlining Act
- Discussing possible means of expanding the Special Projects Section to process more of the larger projects
- Providing a better means of accounting for those projects which are based on a "deposit" system
- Reaching out to building industry representatives, consultants who regularly process applications and members of the public to solicit feedback concerning both the proposed processing improvements and the fee increases

To fully explore the County's land entitlement process, DRP formed a Stakeholders Committee consisting of representatives from the building industry as well as the environmental community; participants included the Building Industry Association, Sierra Club, Santa Monica Mountains Resource Conservation District,

planning/engineering consultants, Urban Land Institute and the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation. A total of six meetings were conducted between June and November 2010; each of the Stakeholders Committee meetings were supported by County technical staff from DRP, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Public Health—Environmental Health, County Counsel and the Fire Department.

In DRP's final report to the Board, a number of improvement projects and next steps were identified. DRP is making progress with implementation of these improvements by working collaboratively with Public Works, Fire, Parks & Recreation and Environmental Health. Approximate implementation schedules and details about each improvement are identified below.

Improvement Projects

All of these projects are scoped and intended as measures that can be accomplished without significant additional resources and within a six to 24-month timeframe.

Reorganization of DRP

The intent of this improvement is to realign case processing staff into geographic service areas and initiate a focus on single-planner point of contact by moving the environmental review function from Impact Analysis to the case planner within the permitting sections. Benefits of this improvement include more consistent delivery of services, a single point of contact for cases and consistent case oversight.

Status:

In the last six to seven months, DRP has implemented a significant number of organizational changes to enhance operations. A geographic emphasis has been established and case processing functions have been realigned so that planners within each geographic area become the single point of contact for projects within that area. Long range planning assets are similarly aligned within each geographic team. DRP has completed the first stage of comprehensive training for all planners to improve effectiveness and service delivery in the new organization. The first training segment completed was a two-day course covering the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); this course was open to staff from a handful of departments who are DRP's counterparts in the CEQA process. Additional training programs are being developed.

Co-Location of County Departments

This improvement proposes to co-locate the DRP, Public Works and Fire Department sections and organizational units that are responsible for overseeing the land division process. The co-location effort would require the co-location team to identify the services to be provided, analyze potential co-location sites, address resource needs and complete a move.

Status:

The concept of physical co-location has been fully explored and is not being pursued at this time. However, DRP continues to explore methods to improve service delivery, including expanding the suite of services provided in our field offices, which are in fact regionally distributed small-scale co-located offices, and increased use of technology to bring staff together in electronic forums. Both of these improvements could be implemented within a six to twelve month timeframe.

Redefining "One Stop" Services

The land entitlement process can be redefined to provide new "One Stop" services at multiple points in the process. This would provide increased opportunities for collaboration, avoid mistakes and misunderstandings and ensure better coordination of conditions of approval between departments.

Status:

DRP has begun discussing the idea of providing more one stop opportunities in the land division process, as well as introducing one stops within the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process, with other departments using the Development Review Committee (DRC) as a forum. This improvement may be accomplished in a six to eighteen month timeframe, with a phased implementation.

Intake Improvements

There is an opportunity to greatly improve the case intake process, including electronic capture of some submission documents, the creation of an electronic case intake pilot project, the creation of a workflow and electronic submission pilot project; development of financial and submission checklists, and elimination of the case processing backlog. Implementation of these items would result in a reduction of paper submissions, faster routing and better tracking of cases, reduced storage requirements, better understanding by applicants of fees and submission requirements, faster action on reviews and shorter review periods.

Status:

DRP is actively preparing an application for an Information Technology Fund (ITF) Grant to implement several pilot projects. The grant request is anticipated to be submitted within 30 days with an expected project kick-off in July. DRP has also identified other improvements that are independent of the pilot project. These improvements include the development of checklists for use in the application process, establishing the ability to accept credit card payments and reducing the required number of map and site plan copies for land division and CUP cases (further discussed under the Internal Documentation Section of this report). The implementation timeframe for these improvements ranges from immediate to eighteen months.

Application Review Improvements

This improvement would involve conducting a pilot project for electronic plan review and markup, and formulate a change management plan for electronic plan review and markup. Other jurisdictions are already doing this successfully. The benefits of such an initiative would include testing the viability of electronic plan review and markup for multiple case types, preparing staff for a transition to electronic plan review and markup and leveraging of the existing investment in Enterprise Content Management (ECM) technology.

Status:

This improvement is linked to the ITF Grant request identified for Intake Improvements. Implementation timeframe is twelve to eighteen months.

Tentative Map Simplification

The Tentative Map Simplification Project would reduce the level of engineering detail required for Tentative Map submissions, develop a process for revising engineering details prior to Final Map approval; improve the Subdivision Committee process and improve coordination between departments. This would create a more predictable process, reduce the time and cost required to complete the Tentative Map process, and improve opportunities for making desirable changes in projects.

Status:

DRP has formed an interdepartmental working group to begin discussing how to proceed with implementation of this improvement and the Substantial Conformance Standards Improvement Project. Both of these projects are complex and will require the County to establish review criteria and decision parameters. A first meeting was held on March 15, with follow-up meetings scheduled in late April and early May. These projects may require ordinance changes. Due to the complexity of each project, and the need to ensure that implementation is properly carried out, these measures are expected to take eighteen months to two years.

Substantial Conformance Standards

This improvement would define and document "Substantial Conformance" standards, provide both the applicant and the community an understanding of the rules, identify key measures of substantial conformance and define "tolerance" values for substantial conformance determination. If implemented, this would reduce project "rework", reduce the number of hearings, reduce the time and cost to get projects to construction, provide continued conformance with good project standards and planning practices and ensure better adherence to Conditions of Approval.

Status:

This improvement is linked to the Tentative Map Simplification Project identified above; it shares the same project description and implementation timeframe.

Fee Management

There are significant opportunities for improvement in DRP's fee management process. The time collection process for drawdown accounts can be enhanced through more detailed task tracking and implementation of daily or weekly time recording practices. DRP's fixed fee permits must also provide improved activity tracking, and ongoing fee management practices must be developed. Implementation of this would provide more accurate accounting for direct costs, better reporting for drawdown accounts, better forecasts for supplemental drawdown deposits and better fee increase rationale.

Status:

DRP has worked with the Auditor-Controller to identify time collection and recording improvements that can be implemented within eCAPS. These measures can be implemented within six months. Further, DRP will be seeking an ITF Grant to fund further research and identification of best practices relating to DRP's cash management procedures at its headquarters and field office locations. The implementation timeframe for this component is six to twelve months.

Park Fee Calculation

A replacement for the current Park Fee Calculation Program used for land division cases must be developed by creating a new application using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology. The primary benefit of this would be ease of use and avoiding a pending system failure.

Status:

DRP and Parks and Recreation have set up a project team to review the potential for using GIS to replace the existing database used by Parks and Recreation. The DRP GIS team has reviewed the existing database and process; it is now working to develop a plan for implementation. The implementation schedule is approximately six months.

Forms and Instructions

DRP needs to develop customer-oriented process documentation for all customer facing processes, create a Web portal for forms and instructions, and develop customer entry versions with an on-line forms library (such as Adobe forms or ECM web forms). If implemented, this would result in less customer confusion: fewer questions; better, more complete and more accurate submissions; less data entry and an easier transition to full electronic submission.

Status:

DRP is preparing an ITF Grant application that would pilot certain application forms as fully integrated e-forms, allowing application data to be entered by a user on DRP's external website and captured directly by a database. DRP has also set up a project team to identify improvements for forms and instructions that may be accomplished separate from the Grant process. This has an implementation timeframe of six to eighteen months.

Internal Documentation

Cross department documentation of all processes needs to be developed; such documentation should focus on cross departmental activities. There is also a need to develop standards for service quality and responsiveness. A quality improvement and problem resolution group should also be formed. This would create a continuous improvement process and better and more consistent services.

Status:

DRP has been using the DRC as a forum to work with other departments to identify potential areas for improvement. Departments have already agreed to reduce required copies for Land Division cases from thirty to five and for CUP cases from thirteen to four. The departments are working toward fully electronic copies over time. The implementation for all improvements ranges from immediate to eighteen months.

Referrals

There is a need to develop documentation of all referral requirements, establish standards for referral issuance and replies, create MOUs with referral agencies and to create a referral tracking mechanism with follow up. The benefits of this include more consistent referral responses, improved turn-around time for referrals and fewer last-minute processing of referrals.

Status:

DRP has been using the DRC as a forum to discuss a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between departments to ensure that case materials referred out to each department will be returned to DRP, with comments, within the agreed-upon timeframes. DRP and DRC are also working on Initial Study referral and preparation. DRP is preparing an ITF Grant request that would fund creation of a pilot system for referral management. The implementation timeline for this improvement is expected to be twelve to eighteen months.

Hearings

Standards must be created for electronic hearing packets; DRP may then begin production of electronic hearing packet materials by conducting a pilot project with one or more Regional Planning Commissioner. This would prepare for migration to full electronic hearing packet review and increased utilization of the new hearing room.

Status:

DRP has created a project team that has been working to develop electronic hearing packets. An internal DRP website has been created for Planning Commissioner access. Implementation timeframe for this improvement is immediate to six months.

Performance Metrics and Measurement

There is a significant need to develop Performance Measurement standards for case processing. The primary benefit is the preparation for implementation of new systems and better performance monitoring.

Status:

DRP has created a project team to develop draft performance standards and metrics. In addition, the ITF Grant request will include funding for the development of dashboards and other tools that will assist with performance measurement. The implementation timeframe for all improvements is expected to be six to eighteen months.

Stakeholder Committee Update

A meeting of the Stakeholder Committee has been scheduled for early June. The meeting will be used to update the Committee members on the progress of the various Implementation Projects and obtain feedback on some of the measures proposed. Another meeting of the Committee will be scheduled for later in the year.

Permit and Land Management Solutions (PALMS) Bridge Proposal

Finally, DRP will include in its ITF Grant application a request to fund additional work that was recommended in the PALMS Study. The work that the Stakeholder Committee completed in 2010 addressed a major task relating to the land development process. However, several significant tasks remain, including the identification of process improvements for planning permits, enforcement and inspections, cash management and accounting. This work will be performed simultaneous to and in conjunction with the various pilot projects summarized earlier in this report.

The Honorable Board of Supervisors
April 28, 2011
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Please let me know if you would like additional information. I would be happy to brief you in greater detail on any aspect of this process.

RJB:DLS

Attachment

c: Chief Executive Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
Department of Public Works
Fire Department
Department of Parks & Recreation
Department of Public Health